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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RABAT 000751

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TERREP

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [KISL](#) [PGOV](#) [MO](#)  
SUBJECT: MOROCCO TERRORISM: MINISTER BRIEFS ON CT STEPS,  
MFA COMPLAINS OF CLOSURE, NGO ATTACKS EXTREMISM

REF: RABAT 701

Classified by Polcouns Craig Karp for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary  
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¶1. (C) In remarks before parliament on April 25, Minister of Interior Benmoussa warned that the threat from terrorism is real and always present. He detailed efforts to upgrade security across the country and said there have been 59 terror-related arrests since March 11. A parliamentary contact praised the Minister's candor, as did MPs speaking to the Moroccan media. Meanwhile, reflecting broader societal revulsion of the new cases of suicide bombing, a prominent Moroccan NGO has launched a media campaign drawing on Moroccan folk culture to assault extremist ideology. Speaking privately, a mid-level MFA official strongly complained to poloff earlier this week about the continued closure of the Consulate in Casablanca, terming the U.S. request for partial closure of the street in front of the building "unreasonable." Fortunately, we have seen no indication of public support for the bombers but we share Benmoussa's belief that the threat will remain with us. End summary.

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Minister Details to Parliament GOM CT Efforts  
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¶2. (SBU) On April 25, Moroccan Minister of Interior Chakib Benmoussa appeared before parliament (at the request of parliamentarians) to brief them on the current terrorist threat in the country and the government's actions to counter it. Echoing remarks made by Communications Minister Benabdellah last week (reftel), Benmoussa affirmed that security forces were on high alert across the country. "The danger is always present and terrorism threatens this country at all times," he warned.

¶3. (SBU) The Minister said that 2,700 new police recruits were in training and would be ready to be deployed by June. 2000 additional police have been assigned to Casablanca, the site of several incidents in March and April. The Minister added that security had been doubled at ports and airports, and special attention was being paid to Ourzazate, Errachidia, and Figuig, provincial cities on Morocco's eastern flank.

¶4. (SBU) Benmoussa told the parliament that the GOM had made a total of 49 arrests since the most recent round of terrorist incidents began in Casablanca on March 11. Of the 59, ten have been released, 31 have been charged, and 18 remain under investigation. Benmoussa rejected analyses linking terrorism in Morocco to poverty. "These terror acts

should by no means be blamed on the social conditions or on the frustration and despair among some youth who blew themselves up," he stated. Rather, he asserted, the evidence suggests that misguided religious ideology provides the terrorists their motivation, citing documents found in the homes of suspects.

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Favorable Reviews  
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15. (C) Parliamentarian Milouda Hazebl, who was present during Benmoussa's appearance, told poloff April 26 that she was impressed by the Minister's appearance and his candor. Benmoussa's forthcoming parliamentary briefing "helped reassure the country" that the GOM was working with deliberation and care to fight terrorism in Morocco. Hazebl's favorable impression of Benmoussa's remarks was echoed in comments to Moroccan newspapers by the leaders of the major party caucuses, who said his deliberation and openness were appreciated.

16. (C) In her conversation with poloff, Hazebl added that she took issue with Benmoussa's rejection of the link between terror and poverty, arguing that poverty creates "fertile ground" for terrorists to operate and recruit and hoped the government would follow a two track approach: strengthening the capabilities of the security forces on the one hand and alleviating social marginalization on the other.

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NGO Assaults Terror  
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17. (SBU) Reflecting public apprehension and revulsion at the suicide bombings, the Moroccan NGO Afak ("Horizons") has launched a public relations campaign assaulting extremist ideology and terror. A 30 second spot airing this week on several major independent radio stations attacks extremists for "twisting Islam" and "teaching hate" at the expense of the country. The spot, in colloquial Moroccan Arabic, mimics the rhyme and cadence of traditional proverbs. Pamphlets printed and distributed by Afak in Arabic and French warn of the spread of an ideology "contrary to our values and marked by hatred, intolerance, exclusion of the other, and violence." The pamphlets urge citizens to be conscious of the dangers such ideology hold for "our security and our democratic and modern society," ending with the slogan "All together against extremism."

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MFA Counterterrorism Officer Critiques Consulate Closure  
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18. (SBU) The Minister's affirmations of a real and present threat notwithstanding, MFA office director equivalent Karim Halim complained privately to poloff on April 23 that the U.S. request for partial street closure in front of the Consulate-General in Casablanca was unreasonable and unrealistic. The continued closure of the Consulate, and the suspension of visa services in particular, he continued, "sends the wrong message," and will undermine U.S. efforts to promote economic growth and cultural exchange. Poloff responded that the U.S. did not want to close the facility or suspend services, but underlined that we would not compromise the safety of our U.S. and Moroccan staff at the site.

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Comment  
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19. (C) We have seen no indications, such as wall posters or graffiti, of public support for the bombers. Quite the contrary. Despite the lack of support, it is probable that

there are more jihadists ready to die out in the community.  
Government efforts to mobilize communities against them  
should help, but as Benmoussa maintained, the threat will  
continue. End comment.

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